

Answering the “Da Vinci Code”

by Rev Timothy Finigan

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Author's Note

This “version” of the lecture on the Da Vinci Code is provided for the convenience of those who have come to one of the occasions I have spoken on the subject. I intend to “tidy up” the notes below and to publish them as an article in Faith Magazine due course. In the meantime, no permission is given to publish these notes in their present form in print or on the internet.

“But it’s just a story”?

At the outset, I should answer one comment which is often made about the DVC. Many people who have read the book will say that it is a cracking adventure story and that it is not a history book. Therefore, it is suggested, there is no need to “refute” its claims since these are only part of a fictional story.

A simple example

To take a simple example, suppose that I am writing a story about a boy who grows up to be a famous cricketer. In his first test match, he scores 15 goals. He moves decides to go to France and live in Barcelona. There he grows to love French wine, especially sherry. And so on ... What is wrong with this narrative is that the facts are wrong. It is no defence to say “It’s just a story.”

Historical fiction

Let me take another example. Suppose I wrote a book of fiction where the action took place during Wellington’s Peninsula campaign. The book aims to debunk all Wellington’s achievements and to show that he was actually a scoundrel who intended to betray England.

In the book, Wellington’s soldiers are dressed in uniforms that are obviously confused with those of Cromwell’s roundheads over a century earlier; Wellington has correspondence with a War Ministry that does not yet exist; and the battle of Talavera is described as taking place on a plain, using breech-loading rifles that had not yet been invented.

Any publisher’s reader to whom such nonsense was submitted would tell the prospective author to go and do some homework before wasting his time again. Were any company foolish enough to publish such drivel it would face a storm of hostility and ridicule. No serious student would be seen dead reading such a book on the Tube. It would certainly not injure Wellington’s reputation.

Holocaust deniers

To show how serious such errors could be, suppose that I wrote a book in which the hero uncovered documents to show that the Nazi holocaust did not

really happen, that only a few criminals were murdered during the war and that the whole story of the holocaust was a conspiracy to prevent the German “Masters of Bethel” from establishing world peace and the eradication of poverty. Rightly, there would be outrage. Responsible people would vilify the book and it would most probably be censored in many states.

I use this example to show that fiction can be pernicious when it purports to give factual or historical background and when that supposed facts and history are ignorantly or deliberately distorted. This is the essential problem with the *Da Vinci Code*.

How did the Da Vinci Code survive?

As we shall see, the DVC has a tendentious aim and includes many gross historical and factual errors that could have been corrected by a little elementary research. The fact that it was not simply laughed off the face of the publishing planet is itself evidence of the extent of anti-Christian prejudice in the world today.

The Priory of Sion

Dan Brown’s claim

The DVC claims that The Priory of Sion is a real organisation. This is listed as a “fact” on the opening page, stating that

In 1975 Paris’s Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Sandro Botticelli, Victor Hugo and Leonardo da Vinci.¹

The facts

In fact, the Priory of Sion was founded in 1956 by four Frenchmen. One of the founders, André Bonhomme admitted in a statement to the BBC in 1996 that it was invented by the four to have fun.

Another founder, Pierre Plantard, had already been convicted for fraud and embezzlement. In a fraud enquiry in the 1990s, Plantard’s house was searched, uncovering documents which claimed, among other things, that he was the King of France. He admitted to the court in 1993 that the Priory of Sion documents were fabrications.

Brown, on the contrary tells us as background that the Dossiers Secrets have been

¹ DVC p.16

authenticated by many specialists and incontrovertibly confirmed what historians had suspected for a long time.²

As we shall see, Brown's familiarity with serious history, is somewhat limited.

“Perfect for history buffs”?!

The “facts” about the Priory of Sion in the DVC make it ludicrous for the *New York Times* to describe it as “perfect for history buffs”³ Even more risible is the description of the *Chicago Tribune* of it as “transmitting several doctorates’ worth of fascinating history and learned speculation”⁴

Opus Dei

Monks in long robes

One of the most basic errors of the DVC which runs throughout the book is the description of the members of Opus Dei as “monks.” This is an elementary misunderstanding which shows the author's lack of knowledge of the Catholic Church and his inability to carry out even the most simple research.

The members of Opus Dei are lay people or secular priests. Opus Dei was founded specifically to sanctify everyday life and work in the world. Its members are not monks, they do not wear “an ankle length hooded robe”⁵ or a “wool robe with a rope tie”⁶ and they do not sleep on the floor. They did not “bail out” the Vatican Bank and they do not arrange assassinations.

Personal prelature of the Pope himself

The DVC also consistently misunderstands the nature of a personal prelature. Throughout the book, the makes it clear that he is under the impression that “personal” refers to the Holy Father so that Opus Dei is presented as “*a personal prelature of the Pope himself*”⁷. In fact, the word “personal” in “Personal Prelature” refers to the people entrusted to the Prelate who has overall pastoral care of Opus Dei. It is a personal prelature because he is the prelate of an identified group of people rather than a territory, as in the case of a Diocesan Bishop. Again, this is an elementary mistake which could have been avoided by some elementary research. These lazy and prejudicial comments about Opus Dei give the lie to Dan Brown's claim:

² DVC p.280

³ Quoted on the opening reviews pages of DVC

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ DVC p.54

⁶ DVC p.368

⁷ DVC p.52 (italics in the original)

I worked very hard to create a fair and balanced depiction of Opus Dei.⁸

Corporal mortification

On the question of corporal mortification, the book claims that it was a mantra of St Josemaría Escrivá that “pain is good.”⁹ In fact, St Josemaría, in common with every other saint and spiritual writer of the Catholic Church throughout history, followed the teaching of Jesus Christ that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must take up our cross daily and follow him. Most of the practices of mortification of Opus Dei are small, invisible acts of self-denial. For example, St Josemaría says this in his book *The Way*:

That joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you; that silence when you're unjustly accused; your friendly conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another in the persons who live with you ... this, with perseverance, is indeed solid interior mortification.¹⁰

In common with saints and holy people of all the world religions, members sometimes practise mortifications such as wearing uncomfortable chains to remind them of the passion of Christ. It is a travesty to portray them as inflicting serious physical harm upon themselves. Such practises would be abhorred by any spiritual director in Opus Dei. Again, we can quote St Josemaría:

You are going to punish yourself voluntarily for your weakness and lack of generosity? Very good: but let it be a reasonable penance, imposed as it were, on an enemy who is at the same time your brother.¹¹

Opus Dei is certainly full of people who enthusiastically and uncompromisingly follow the teaching of Christ. Their charitable works are very often focussed on the poor and disadvantaged in the inner cities. The members are usually generous, courteous and well-mannered. To portray them in the way that the DVC does is a slander on many good, hard working men and women who live their lives in the service of Christ and his people. Those of us who are not members of Opus Dei should be angry on their behalf.

Albinism and prejudice

Finally on Opus Dei, it may be true that among the members, there are some “albinos.” The presentation of the chief villain in the DVC as a sinister character

⁸ Brown, D. Online at www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html (Accessed 27/7/05)

⁹ DVC p.30

¹⁰ Escrivá, J *The Way* n.173

¹¹ Escrivá, J *The Way* n.202

is closely linked to his being an albino. This tells us more about the author's prejudice against people with different physical characteristics than about Opus Dei.

Groups representing people with albinism have protested vehemently against the popular portrayal of albinos as sinister villains in films such as *The Matrix*.

Prejudice is particularly felt in many African countries where children with albinism may suffer serious prejudice and disadvantage. In some areas of Zimbabwe, there is a superstition that if you sleep with an albino woman, you will be cured of AIDS. This has led to albino women being raped. In Jamaica, there have long been superstitions about Albinism. A popular singer has recently been successful in helping to overcome this prejudice.

For an amusing bite-back, I like this story from the Albinism Fellowship. A parents is advising others about how to cope with unintended hurtful comments. She is speaking about her daughter:

On another occasion as a 4 year old she was running around playing a game of chase with some other children. A lady commented rather loudly about her white hair. Not pausing from her game she informed this lady "that's because I don't have any melanin", as she dashed passed. This lady's face was a picture and it was she who was lost for words.¹²

NOAH, the National Organisation for Albinism and Hypopigmentation have to offer on their website a guide for children with albinism to cope with teasing and name-calling.

To say that the DVC does not help is perhaps an understatement.

The Gnostic Gospels

The DVC also makes the claim that the Bible was collated by Constantine.¹³ This was because the canonical gospels supposedly made him godlike and the other (Gnostic) gospels emphasised his human traits.

What Gnostics really believed

There were many Gnostic sects, deriving from ideas current at the time of the Gospel of St John and the letters of St Paul to Timothy and Titus where such ideas are explicitly rejected.

The word "Gnostic" comes from the special "gnosis" or knowledge, received by a secret tradition from the apostles or a special revelation to the founder of the particular sect.

¹² On the FAQ section of *albinism.org.uk* website (accessed 4/11/05)

¹³ DVC p.313

At the heart of Gnostic belief was the idea of a demiurge who was derived from the supreme being by a series of emanations or aeons. Because of a fall or mischance, he created the material world which was antagonistic to the spiritual world. The path home was through the gnosis by which a person became spiritual rather than fleshly.

So, far from emphasising the humanity of Christ, the Gnostics rejected the idea of the incarnation because they believed that the flesh was antagonistic to the truly spiritual. For them, Christ only appeared to be a man.

Again, far from being a source of equality for women, Gnosticism tended to denigrate birth and therefore also women. In some sects, there were priestesses but these were abused by the men who held power in the sect.

Beliefs of a Gnostic sort persisted and revived from time to time. St Augustine knew the Manichees and there were similar doctrines in the the heresy of Albigenianism in southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries. These took the doctrine to its logical conclusion, considering it virtuous to commit suicide by voluntary starvation, a process known as the *endura*.

The Apocryphal gospels

So much for the beliefs of the Gnostics which are comprehensively misunderstood by the DVC. But what of the origin of the Gnostic Gospels?

There were three sorts of apocryphal gospels that were not included by the Church in the canon of scripture. Some were considered favourably by some of the Fathers of the Church, such as the Gospel according to the Hebrews and the Gospel according to the Egyptians; others "filled in" elements from the life of Jesus that were not included in the canonical gospels – such are the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the History of Joseph the Carpenter and the Departure of Mary. Others were written to support heretical views, especially those of the Gnostics; such are the Gospels of Marcion, of the Twelve Apostles and, perhaps the best known, the Gospel of Thomas.

Differences between the apocryphal gospels and the 4 canonical gospels

We must then ask when and why the Church accepted the four gospels and not the numerous other candidates for the title of "gospel."

The first and most obvious reason was the antiquity of the Gospels. The earliest of the non-canonical gospels was written no earlier than 150 AD. The commonly accepted dates for the gospels are as follows: Matt Aramaic 50, Greek 65-70; Mark 65; Luke 60-70; John 90. The gospels were already in use and regarded as having a special status before the earliest of the Gnostic gospels was written.

The sober accounts of Christ in the gospels compares with the sometimes esoteric, sometimes ludicrous portrait of the Gnostic gospels. For example, in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the five year old Jesus is told off by St Joseph for making clay sparrows on the Sabbath. His response is to clap his hands so that they come to life and fly away chirping. Again, in the carpenter's shop, a piece of wood for making a bed is not long enough so the young Jesus stretches it.

It is interesting to see the difference between these works of magic and the miracles of Jesus which are carried out as part of his preaching of the Kingdom of God.

The formation of the Canon of scriptures

Already by the end of the 2nd century, St Irenaeus of Lyons emphasises the canonicity of the four-fold gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Even earlier than this, St Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp quoted Matthew, Luke and John and Ignatius employs the term "it is written."

The formation of the "canon" of the New Testament was a gradual development, reaching its present form towards the end of the fourth century. This is possibly the source for the assertion in the DVC that the bible was collated by Constantine.

Jehovah

Incidentally, the DVC makes such elementary mistakes over well-worn scriptural questions that, again, it seems that Brown is unable to undertake even the most elementary verification of any of his background material. In a ludicrous attempt to further his feminist interpretation of religion, he makes the mistake of saying that the tetragrammaton YHWH derives from "Jehovah" which he claims indicates an androgynous union between Jah and Havah, the pre-Hebraic name for Eve.¹⁴ But, in fact, the name Jehovah was a 16th century invention based on the name Adonai

Constantine invented the divinity of Christ

The book presents the divinity of Christ as a doctrine invented by Constantine. Up to that time, apparently, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet.¹⁵

This assertion entirely ignores the question of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. There are indeed various views on this subject but nobody could seriously hold the view that the notion of the divinity of Christ is absent from the scriptures.

¹⁴ DVC p.411

¹⁵ DVC p.315

The Gospels

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus claims the power to forgive sins, he is conscious of divine power in himself, he calls for faith in himself. There are many other indications that would belong in a lecture on the divinity of Christ. However, all we are concerned with here is to show that the divinity of Christ was not invented in the 4th century by Constantine. The clearest indication of belief in Christ as God is found in St John's Gospel which begins with the affirmation that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh." Throughout the gospel, Jesus speaks words which are a claim to be God and are taken as such by the Jews. To give a few examples:

Jesus says "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8.58); "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30); "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10.38). The response of his followers is shown by St Thomas who acclaims "My Lord and my God" (John 20.28)

The question of whether these statements are historical or the actual words spoken is not to the point here – that would be for another apologetic lecture on the divinity of Christ. The point is that before the end of the first century, we have clear belief in Jesus as God.

St Paul

The same belief is found clearly in St Paul who calls Jesus "God, blessed for ever" (Rom 9.5) "our great God and Saviour" (Tit 2.13). He says that "all things were created through him and for him ... and in him all things hold together" (Col 1.15-17) and he says that "every knee should bow before him" (Phil 2.10)

Again, whatever exegetes and theologians wish to discuss about these affirmations, they are not consistent with the idea that Jesus was a mortal prophet.

The ante-Nicene Fathers

Brown's assertion also ignores the entire study of the ante-Nicene Fathers. If you study Christology at any university or if you study the history of the early Church, you will need to look at the works of St Ignatius of Antioch, St Irenaeus, St Justin, Tertullian, St Cyprian, Origen, and others who all believed in the divinity of Christ. I will not give a catena of texts: those could be taken from a standard text book such as Ludwig Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. We may simply note one of the earliest writers, Ignatius of Antioch, writing near the beginning of the second century, who repeatedly speaks of "Jesus Christ our God" (e.g. Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1)

Indeed there were major controversies before 325 in which the precise question at issue was the divinity of Christ.

The Arian controversy

What happened in the time of Constantine was the Council of Nicea decided against Arius who taught that there was a time when Christ did not exist. It was Arius' view that was new. His opponents and appealed most of all to the tradition of the apostles and the Fathers of the Church who had written before.

Other issues

The Church demonised St Mary Magdalene

It is difficult to see how the Church's constant veneration of St Mary Magdalen as a saint can be seen as demonising her. St Mary Magdalene has been represented in some of the finest Christian art, has been chosen as patroness for Churches and Colleges (Magdalen College, Oxford is *Collegium Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae*) and her feast has been part of the calendar of saints in the Church's Liturgy since the earliest calendars.

In fact, the denigration of Mary Magdalen is most striking in the Gnostic gospel which is the source for Brown's conjecture that she was the royal consort of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Thomas, Peter sneers that women are not worthy of life. Jesus says "I will lead her in order to make her male." It was the Gnostics who denigrated women, not the Christians.

The Church killed millions of witches

The DVC repeats the absurd claim that

During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astounding five million women.¹⁶

The Church did not burn 5 million witches during the Middle Ages. During the period 1400-1800, an estimated 30,000-50,000 people accused of witchcraft (20 percent of whom were men) were executed by Catholic and Protestant institutions and governments. In many cases, they were not, in fact burned at the stake but hanged – as in England.

Furthermore, the persecution of so-called witches was nothing like as widely practised in the Catholic Church as it was in Protestant countries of the so-called "enlightenment".

The Spanish Inquisition, to mention just one institution, decided in the early 17th century against the persecution of witches and issued instructions urging proper investigation of alternative causes and extreme caution in dealing with any alleged cases.

If the witches confess to murdering children or adults, the inquisitors are to ascertain (a) whether the victims died at the time referred to by the witches, (b) whether the deaths might have been from natural causes, and (c) whether there were any

marks on the bodies or any other unusual circumstances concerning their deaths.

If the witches confess to destroying crops, inquiries are to be made as to (a) whether the damage was really inflicted, and (b) whether at the time in question the fields had been exposed to hail, fog, gales or frost which in themselves were sufficient to cause the loss of the crops.¹⁷

The "burning times" as they are referred to by pagans were indeed a sad part of European history.

However, it is not a specific reflection on the Catholic Church which was relatively lenient in such matters.

By the way, Brown even has his exaggerated number wrong. The figure usually quoted – possibly originating with a claim made by Cecil Williamson in the Isle of Man's Witchcraft Museum in 1951 – is 9 million, not 5 million.

Historical unreliability of the DVC

Many people have been taken in

The newspapers reviews quoted at the beginning of the DVC indicate that many people have been misled to think that the DVC contains serious historical research. In fact, it is a tissue of conspiracy theory and second-hand reliance on pot boiling second-rate pulp pseudo history.

Brown's sources

For example, the author obviously thinks that the 1982 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is a serious work of historical research. Even his modest bibliography and acknowledgements do not stand up to scrutiny. He acknowledges the help of the Project Gutenberg. As this is an online collection of texts in the public domain, this tells us nothing more than that Brown can use the internet. He also acknowledges the help of Catholic World News. When the editor was contacted on this matter, he said that they did not recall any contact with him and that he was not listed as a past or present subscriber.

Lack of familiarity with genuine scholarship

The bibliography which Brown offers¹⁸ is entirely composed of secondary works, most of them either feminist or highly polemical. His lack of familiarity with mainstream historical debate and research is shown by his treatment of the early Church, the scriptures and the divinity of Christ, subjects on which serious research has been conducted at every

¹⁷ Extracts from the Instructions of the Council of the Inquisition on Witchcraft, 29 August 1614 quoted in Rawlings, Helen. *The Spanish Inquisition*. Blackwell. Oxford. 2006 page 133

¹⁸ See Brown, D. "Resources for Researchers" online at www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/resources.html (Accessed 27/7/05)

¹⁶ DVC p.173 (italics in original)

age of the Church's history and continues to be conducted according to the standards of scholarship which are demanded at modern universities; standards that seem to have eluded Dan Brown entirely.

More silly mistakes

The London Police

One which made me laugh out loud is "This is the London Police." It's so quintessentially uninformed. (We have the Metropolitan Police, the City Police and the Transport Police in London.) I'm surprised that the characters in the story they don't go into an "English Pub" and ask for "a beer, please."

The bible on the altar

A good example of the ignorance of Catholic custom in the DVC is shown by the description of the Church of Saint Sulpice.

There, atop the main altar, propped open on a gilded book stand, sat an enormous leather-bound bible.¹⁹

Vatican cars

The DVC says that Vatican cars are now unostentatious and unmarked. No, they are marked and easily recognisable by the number plates containing SCV (*Stato della Citta del Vaticano*.)

Da Vinci's Vatican commissions

Da Vinci did not receive hundreds of commissions from the Vatican. He received one – and this was not carried out. Brown is obviously confusing Da Vinci with Michelangelo.

No chalice at the Last Supper?

Da Vinci was illustrating an episode from St John's Gospel which does not have the institution narrative.

Where is the DVC going?

If we go back to the "it's just a story" line, we can look a little more closely at where the DVC is actually going.

Denigration of the Church

The Church throughout is portrayed as a corrupt, purely human institution which has covered up the true scriptures and misled the faithful. The Church's implication in assassination plots serves to discredit it thoroughly even if it is slightly mitigated at the end of the book.

One of the impressions that people take away from the book is that a clever, well-informed, historically aware person will be quite sceptical about the Church. As we have seen, there is actually nothing academically respectable to back up the impression that is given. However, most people are not able or

willing to discover this and will simply take the surface assertions that the book is scholarly and assume that what it says is accurate.

Promotion of Gnosticism

The alternative to the Church is a form of Gnosticism. As Fr Luiz has shown, it is a somewhat modified form of Gnosticism in any case but it has many of the characteristics of Gnosticism in its various historical manifestations. Notably, the book offers an esoteric path to true religion for those who have special knowledge.

The central plot is that it is a good thing to restore the Gnostic religion based on Mary Magdalen. The thesis appeals particularly to those with some sympathy for feminism because it panders to the idea that the Church has oppressed women.

Tending towards evil

We then have to ask what is left. For much of the Sophie is estranged from her father. We eventually learn that this was a result of seeing him lying on an altar engaged in a sexual act in the presence of various other members of a sect. We might find it understandable that she is disgusted at this and wants nothing more to do with him. However, we are clearly meant to sympathise with her eventual conversion to see that this sexual act is part of a grander plan for the good.

To find this somewhat troubling is a good instinct. The denigration of the Church, the worship of a goddess and the consummation of this worship in a ritual sexual act is a deeply evil combination. People who promote the occult in various forms often like to insist that their version of the occult has nothing to do with Satanism. Dan Brown's repetition of the 5 million witches slander is a part of this attempt to distance the occult from anything we should be genuinely concerned about.

However, we should be in no doubt about the demonic link that is here. The DVC promotes a form of religion that denies the divinity of Christ, worships a false religion and elevates the sexual act to a ritual act of worship. This is very much what demonic activity looks like. If it looks like a dog, smells like a dog and barks like a dog, chances are, it's a dog.

Why did it succeed?

The surprising things about the Da Vinci Code is that it can be taken seriously at all.

The reason it is taken seriously is the widespread prejudice that exists in society against the Church. We need not be too surprised about that. Jesus warned us it would happen. But we must recognise it for what it is. We should not be credulous. Having taken the time to read the DVC, I am surprised that Catholics feel they need to bother unless they are

¹⁹ DVC p.177

actively engaged in refuting it. It needs to be refuted not least because so many Catholics say things like “I found it very interesting.” You worry about just which slander, falsehood or downright mistake they have swallowed whole.

And we need to be ready to “give an answer” as St Peter says. Therefore, to finish on a positive note, I want to run briefly through a few reminders about the Church in practice as an “institution.”

The Church – some reminders

In order not to leave with a bad taste in our mouths, we should remember some things about the Catholic Church. Yes, there are some bad people in the Church and some bad things have been done by people in the Church. But there are also many good people in the Church and many good things have been done by people in the Church. Overall, the Church herself is a tremendous force for the good.

The Church fosters scholarship

The DVC ignores genuine Christian scholarship. This is a grievous error of omission. Throughout the world, faculties founded and run by the Church continue the work begun in the early centuries of the Church and brought to great flourishing in the middle ages.

Just to take a few brief examples, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were not only set up by the religious orders but they were reformed and set on the path of the modern classical curriculum largely by the influence of John Fisher, Thomas More, Erasmus and their circle of friends.

After the debacle over Galileo, the Linnaean Academy provided a forum for the natural sciences to flourish and one of its offshoots is the internationally respected Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

The Church has always fostered scholarship and continues to do so. As our culture proceeds down the long slow path of scholarly self-destruction in the pursuit of results, targets and utilitarian outcomes, the Church will remain stubbornly committed to pure research and knowledge for its own sake – seen in the light of this world. It will continue in this path because in the light of eternity, the search for truth in any field of research is part of the search for the wisdom of God.

The Church promotes education

The Church’s concern for scholarship has always been allied to the concern to share knowledge with others and to continue the search. In other words, the Church has always been committed to education.

Throughout the world, Catholic schools provide education where there is none and excellence of

education where there is alternative secular provision.

The Church promotes peace

Many people do not realise that the Geneva Convention, the attempt to mitigate the worst horrors of warfare with some civilised limits, is a descendant of St Augustine’s theory of the just war. That was never intended to provide an excuse for war but to provide limits to warfare as far as possible.

In every recent conflict, the voice of the Pope and the Vatican has been firmly to call for peace. The call is not always heeded on the ground. One could point to the example of modern slavery by comparison. Every Pope since the first ships sailed to the new world, has condemned modern slavery. The message was not always preached in the local Churches. This failure to heed the voice of the popes meant that slavery took a shamefully long time to be eradicated. Fr Linus Clovis has shown in an excellent talk how directly this is paralleled with Papal teaching on human life.

The Church promotes genuine “sexual health”

Some time, sooner or later, people will realise what an awful thing our society has done in killing 6 million babies, creating human embryos for destruction and fuelling the slaughter by sexualising children and removing any restraint upon sexual license.

When they look back, they will see that the Popes preached consistently on it. They will find also that the message was ignored by the local Churches. The reaction of horror may be soon enough for your own grandchildren to ask you “What did you do?”

The Church provides healthcare

It is notable that the failed 100% condom use policy in Thailand has led to an enormous incidence of HIV/AIDS in that country while in the Philippines which has emphasised chastity and monogamy, HIV/AIDS has been a small fraction of that level. The irony is that in Thailand, the most effective provider of care for the victims of HIV/AIDS has been the Church, particularly the Camillian Fathers.

The Catholic Church is, in fact, the largest healthcare provider in the world. In the West, institutions that have been providing care for decades or centuries are being slowly strangled by bureaucracy. Usually this is in order to provide an overdue remedy for shortcomings in public institutions or in order to force all institutions to follow a morally corrupt approach to “diversity”. At the same time, in countries that are affected by poverty or disaster, the Church’s religious orders, dioceses and parishes are often first on the ground with practical help, reconstruction and genuine healthcare

Do not be afraid!

We have no reason to be ashamed of the Church. On the contrary, Jesus Christ calls us to be living members of the Church so that she can continue to proclaim with confidence the message of Christ's salvation to the world.

Jesus was slandered by those who heard his teaching and he said "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too." But the first step in growing under persecution is to recognise it as persecution.

Further Reading

Miesel, S "Dismantling the Da Vinci Code" *Crisis Magazine* September 2003. Available online at www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm (Accessed 27/7/05)

Welborn, A "The Da Vinci Code: the facts behind the fiction." *Our Sunday Visitor* May 2004. Available online at www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0035.html (Accessed 27/7/05)

Appendix 1 Gospels as texts

Now to compare the gospels with some classical examples: Christ's death was c.30, the Synoptics were written c.70. Papias mentions them c.125. Compare that with Herodotus who is first mentioned 100 years after his death by Aristotle and then next by Cicero 400 years later. Cicero is the first person to mention Thucydides, some 300 years after his death. Caesar's Commentaries only mention 159 years after his death, by Plutarch and Suetonius and the Annals of Tacitus are not mentioned for 200 years. The point is that the gospels are closer to the events than other accounts which are regarded as trustworthy.

All ancient documents where there are more than one copy have errors in them made by the people who copied them. For many ancient texts that the classicists study, there are hardly any copies. For the gospels, there are over 400 codices, the earliest being the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus which date to the 4th century and are thus only 300 years removed from the time of composition. There are fragments from much earlier such as the Rylands Papyrus which dates back to the first half of the second century. 1400 years separates the writings of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Thucydides and the earliest known extant codices. 1600 Euripides & Catullus, 1300 Plato, 1200 Demosthenes, 700 Terence. Vergil 400 is the most favoured. 7/8 of the gospel texts are beyond discussion. Most of the variants are concerned with spelling or word order. Only about 15 really important variants. Again in this

respect, the gospels are better off than most classical texts.